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ABSTRACT

This one-page abstract summarizes the final report of a federally funded project titled, "Post-School Status of Young Adults Identified as Learning Disabled While Enrolled in Public Schools: A Comparison of Those Enrolled and Not Enrolled in Learning Disabilities Programs." The follow-up study compared the status of 25 students diagnosed but not placed in learning disabilities classes and 75 students placed in learning disabilities classes. All students had been out of school at least 18 months and may or may not have graduated. Results found that most of the individuals were financially independent, had little difficulty obtaining or holding jobs (though the jobs frequently yielded low incomes). Almost half had married and only 4% were divorced. Nineteen had been arrested of whom 12 had been convicted and one jailed. Only 31% had obtained education or training after high school. Sixty-eight percent reported seldom or never experiencing reading problems as adults. The total sample's dropout rate was 42% There was a clear trend for those who had not been placed in learning disabilities classes to earn more than those who had. It was hypothesized that superior coping skills characterize the students diagnosed as learning disabled but not placed in learning disabilities classes. (DB)

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ERIC/SEP SPECIAL PROJECT ON INTERAGENCY INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

RESEARCH & RESOURCES ON SPECIAL EDUCATION

ABSTRACT VIII
APRIL 1987

POST-SCHOOL STATUS OF LEARNING DISABLED STUDENTS

Follow-up studies of special education students can serve as a measure of program effectiveness. In the case of learning disabilities, such studies can answer questions about the nature and effects of such disabilities—for example, do they represent a lag in development that will be caught up in later years? Are they primarily academic difficulties that will make little difference in adult life?

Follow-up studies can also be useful in defining variables that predict later outcomes, such as employment and income, and intermediate variables, such as dropping out of school. If school records contain information on these variables, schools then have the potential to provide special attention that will facilitate more positive outcomes for students.

Post-School Status of Young Adults Identified as Learning Disabled While Enrolled in Public Schools: A Comparison of Those Enrolled and Not Enrolled in Learning Disabilities Programs is a study funded by the U.S. Department of Education of 100 students in Alabama who were diagnosed as learning disabled. The study included 25 students who were diagnosed but not placed in learning disabilities classes and 75 who were placed in learning disabilities classes. The study included students who dropped out of school as well as graduates.

METHOD

The sample was selected from a total of 455 former students of the Lauderdale County, Alabama, school system. The selected sample all met specific study requirements (diagnosis as learning disabled, specified records on file with the school system, current location within 50 miles of the county, born before 1964 with at least 18 months elapsed time since leaving the school system, and agreement to interview). Data sources included special education records, permanent pupil records, and interviews with each member of the sample.

Nine clusters of variables were investigated: employment history and satisfaction, satisfaction with high school preparation, post-high school education or training, dependence on parents, marital history, perceived competence in meeting day-to-day reading requirements, contacts with the legal justice system, and status as high school graduate or dropout. In addition, the study assessed whether school records contained data on variables that can predict post-school status.

RESULTS

The authors conclude that, in general, the sample was adjusting quite well to adulthood, especially when compared to samples of other follow-up studies. Nearly half had married and only 4% had divorced. They were generally financially independent, with about 78% stating that parents contributed less than 20% of their yearly income. They generally reported little difficulty in obtaining or holding jobs, although the jobs they held frequently yielded low incomes. There was a clear trend for those who had not been placed in learning disabilities classes to earn more than those who had, although the types of jobs held were similar. There were 19 in the sample who had been arrested; of these, 12 had been convicted, and 1 had been sentenced to jail. Only 31% of the sample had obtained education or training after high school.

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Each former student was asked to rate his or her reading ability as compared to the demands of work and everyday living. Overall, 68% reported that they seldom or never experienced reading problems as adults; however, 5% stated that they always had problems.

Several predictive variables were identified. The presence of other persons with learning problems in the immediate family was predictive of placement in a learning disabilities class. Those who had not been placed in learning disabilities classes had lower absenteeism and higher grades prior to referral, factors which may have influenced the placement committee. Both absenteeism and grade point average were found to be predictive of the highest grade attended, and grade point average was predictive of current income range. Those who had been placed in classes had higher performance IQs than verbal, while the nonplaced group had higher verbal IQs than performance.

The sample's dropout rate was 42%. The presence of siblings or friends who withdrew could be factors that could stimulate dropping out, but about 70% of the sample had no sibling dropouts and over 60% had no close friends who dropped out. The presence of peer dropouts was, however, found to be predictive of early school withdrawal.

IMPLICATIONS

The authors hypothesize that superior coping skills characterize the students who were diagnosed as learning disabled but not placed in learning disabilities classes. They recommend further research to detail the specific coping skills exhibited by successful learning disabled persons, as opposed to less successful learning disabled persons. They conclude that learning disabilities can and do persist beyond the school years for some persons, and recommend that the characteristics of persons who exhibit persistent disabilities be identified and an effort made to provide them with training in compensatory and alternative coping strategies. Further, they state that educators should be made aware of the factors that might lead learning disabled students to drop out. Persons who appear to be at risk of dropping out need to be educated regarding the effects of their decisions. For those who do drop out, transition training should be provided and the procedure for getting a GED should be discussed.

Post-School Status of Young Adults Identified as Learning Disabled While Enrolled in Public Schools: A Comparison of Those Enrolled and Not Enrolled in Learning Disabilities Programs. August, 1984. 201 pp. U.S. Department of Education Grant No. GOO8302185. Richard M. Cobb and W. Donald Crump, University of Alabama. Available for $.78 (microfiche) or $16.65 (hard copy), plus postage, from ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 3900 Wheeler Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22304 (1-800-227-3742). Order ED Number 253 029.

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